

SCADDING

CABOT'S HEAD

1892



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(LAKE HURON)

CABOT AND CABOTIA.

BY

HENRY SCADDING, D.D.

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CABOT AND CABOTIA.

By Henry Scadding, D.D.

THE well-known remarkable promontory, which divides the Georgian Bay from Lake Huron proper, is known as Cabot's Head, and is so marked on modern maps. Cabot's Head is situated in the county of Bruce and in the township of Lindsay, at the east side of the promontory looking into Georgian Bay, whilst Cape Hurd, situate in the township of St. Edmund in the same county, forms the western point of the promontory looking out upon Lake Huron. In D. W. Smith's First Gazetteer of Western Canada (1797), we are told that "Cabot's Head is a large promontory running into Lake Huron west of Gloucester and Machedash Bay, and embays a large part of that lake at its easternmost extremity, stretching itself towards the Manitou Islands." In the maps accompanying this early Gazetteer, Cabot's Head is accordingly conspicuously marked in Lake Huron, as thus described.

Sebastian Cabot, son of John Cabot, was born at Bristol in 1477. His father was a flourishing Venetian merchant there, and greatly interested in the maritime discoveries of the day.

The commission for making discoveries in the West, issued by Henry VII. in 1495, was addressed to John Cabot, the Venetian merchant settled at Bristol, and to his three sons, Lewis, Sebastian and Sanchius. A supple-

mentary charter having the same object in view was issued by Henry very soon after, and this was addressed to John Cabot solely, reference being made, however, to deputies who might represent him, and, under this term, his three sons mentioned in the preceding charter may have been implied. The constant tradition at Bristol has been that the son Sebastian was the leading spirit in the carrying out of these expeditions, and it is a question whether John Cabot in person accompanied any of them, his son Sebastian, being a practical mariner and pilot, effectively taking his place.

Of the other brothers we hear nothing, but they, of course, being members of the firm, so to speak, would share in the profits and honours which might ultimately arise from the enterprise. The father cannot have long survived, and it is to Sebastian alone that commissions for discoveries are addressed in the following two reigns. It is Sebastian that is figured in the fine portrait by Holbein, on which he is styled "*Primus inventor novae terrae pro Henrico Septimo Angliae Rege*"—"The first discoverer of a new Land for Henry the Seventh, King of England." He is here also distinguished by the epithet *Anglus*, Englishman, having reference doubtless to the fact that he was born at Bristol, whilst his merchant father, John, was a native of Venice.

Sebastian, as we have just seen, was, with his father, commissioned to undertake a voyage of discovery, and on this occasion he sighted the coast of North America on June 24, 1497, reaching the shore of Labrador about latitude 56°, and then coasting southwards he fell in with an island, generally understood to be Newfoundland, but some say it was Cape Breton or Prince Edward Island. In an entry in the privy purse expenses of Henry VII., we have a gift of ten pounds recorded 10th of August, 1497, "to him that found the new isle;" and in the year following, 1498, we have the same king granting to John Cabot and his son Sebastian permission "to convey and lede to the londe and isles of late founde by the said persons in our name and by our commaundement," etc. It will thus appear that the island of Newfoundland has curiously

retained as its proper name an indefinite phrase applied to Cabot's discoveries in Henry VII.'s reign. So it has come to pass that while to Columbus is due the discovery of the West India Islands and a portion of the northern coast of South America, it is to a native-born British mariner, Sebastian Cabot, acting, as it would seem, for his father, John Cabot, that Europe was indebted for the discovery of North America proper, that region having never been seen or even thought of by Christopher Columbus. Some years afterwards (1517), in the reign of Henry VIII., we have Sebastian Cabot again sent on an expedition westward, and on this occasion he appears to have penetrated first into the River St. Lawrence, and afterwards to have explored Hudson's Bay, and to have given English names to some places thereabout. He was subsequently warmly patronized by Edward VI., and was instrumental in establishing a trade between England and Russia, but in Queen Mary's reign he seems not to have been so high in favour. The Emperor Charles V. of Germany, however, certainly patronized him, and entrusted him with some duties connected with marine discoveries. Where or when Sebastian Cabot died, is not distinctly known.

I am glad to have an opportunity of recalling the fact that we have such an enduring existing monument in our Province, of this most useful English discoverer, as the bold promontory in Lake Huron, entitled now for at least 100 years, Cabot's Head. It were to be wished that some one or other of our eminent landscape artists would make a point of presenting to the Canadian public a fine characteristic drawing of this promontory which has so much history associated with it. It would make a good companion to the now rather common pictorial representation of Thunder Cape in Lake Superior. A most interesting narrative, entitled "The Remarkable Life, Adventures and Discoveries of Sebastian Cabot, of Bristol, the Founder of Great Britain's Maritime Power, Discoverer of America, and Its First Colonizer" was published in London in the year 1869, the author being J. F. Nicholls, City Librarian of Bristol. Prefixed to this work is the fine portrait already referred to, said to be by Holbein,

of Sebastian Cabot seated before a globe. A label above him bears the inscription "*Effigies Sebastiani Caboti Angli, filii Johannis Caboti, Veneti, militis aurati, primi inventoris terrae novae.*" The pious motto is added "*Spes Mea in Deo est.*" The expression "*militis aurati*" seems to imply that Cabot was a Chevalier of some order of knighthood, possibly foreign. The chain of gold which surrounds and depends from his neck in the picture may be a symbol of this honour. A well-known bookseller at Bristol, Mr. George, has long styled his establishment "*The Cabot's Head,*" and the device of a likeness of Cabot appears upon the title page of his catalogues with the inscription appended, "*Pro Anglis Novum Agrum Invenit, Anno Christi 1497.*" He discovered for the English people a new territory in the year of our Lord 1497.

Lieutenant-Governor Kirkpatrick, it will be remembered, at the late review of the trained Cadets of the public schools of Toronto (Oct. 13th, 1892), appropriately and happily referred to the facts that I have just detailed. He said very truly that the actual explorations of Columbus were confined to certain West India Islands, and a portion of the northern part of South America, and that the revelation of the continent of North America was chiefly due to Cabot, an Englishman acting under the authority of the English Crown. The word *Cabotia* has been more than once suggested as a general name for the British possessions in North America. I remember a large, finely engraved map of these possessions hanging on the walls of Mr. Fothergill's study at Toronto, years ago, with this name attached in large letters as an appellation for the portion of the globe therein delineated. And in Lindsey's "*Life and Times of Mackenzie,*" Vol. I., p. 57, is to be read the following note having reference to the general name *Cabotia*: "*Cabotia, a word derived from the discoverer Cabot, and one which has been regarded as the best designation for the whole of British North America. While Nova Scotia or New Brunswick would not like to sink her individuality as part of Canada, she would not object to be a part of Cabotia. Canadians, however, would object to change the name of their country.*" The text to which

this note is appended is a portion of the Diary (Dec. 14th, 1826) of Mr. W. L. Mackenzie himself, and is remarkable as containing an admirable fore-shadowing of Confederation, both colonial and imperial. "We have written much and often, advocating an effective and united government for the Colonies in the bonds of amity and relationship with England. We have sent hundreds of copies of our journal to Europe to distinguished persons with that project specially marked and noted, but were always afraid that the idea would be treated as an idle chimera, even by the best and wisest of British statesmen. It would, however, be the best and safest policy; for England can continue to hold Cabotia only by the ties of friendship, amity, and mutual advantage—ties which, with the divine blessing, would be greatly strengthened, were the talents, the resources and the enterprise of all the Colonies fully brought into action in a liberal, enlightened and united general Government." It is here plainly to be seen that Mr. W. L. Mackenzie was in 1826, and long previously, greatly in advance of his age in his ideas of Colonial policy. His words admirably express the noble objects which the advocates of Imperial Confederation have in view at the present moment. Mr. Nicholls, in his interesting "Memoir of Sebastian Cabot" already referred to, puts the case of Cabot and his discoveries, as compared with that of Columbus and his discoveries, in a nut-shell, as it were, thus (p. 77): "Were poetical justice done to Sebastian Cabot the whole of the northern continent should be called Cabotia; for from the 68° north latitude to the 30°, or from the northernmost part of Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Mexico, he was the first European who surveyed its coasts or attempted to colonize its deserted shores; whilst the southern continent, or at least the Western Indies should bear the honoured name—Columbia." It is evident that Sebastian Cabot largely divides with Columbus the honours arising from first discoveries made on the Continent of America; and it would be well if the astute personages who give us to understand that they have power to regulate such matters, were to take the merits of the latter into their serious consideration.

Sebastian Cabot would certainly be found to have been a man of excellent principles and very high aims, as shown by his model book of instructions directed by him to be read once a week on board of every ship during his later expeditions, as may be seen at large on page 156 of Nicholls' work. Our Continent might then hereafter have the benefit of a two-fold superintendence carried on conjointly by saintly agency, somewhat after the manner of that exercised over maritime interests by the Dioscuri of old, the Gemini of our zodiac, the "Twin Constellation," the "lucida Sidera" of Horace's famous ode.

